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ABSTRACT

A junior-senior level course in listening focuses on a 2- to 3-day unit on examining communication and cultural diversity. In this unit, the primary element is an activity involving student participation, and the major theme of this activity is cultural values and norms. Attribution training, a technique designed to teach persons from one culture to interpret events as persons from another culture do, is used to help students address the role of cultural values in the process of effective listening in intercultural interactions. This course is based on an original project (constructed by Hachiya) in which American and Japanese students were requested to select among alternative value related choices for each of several episodes depicting a situation which could involve a problematic interaction between persons from different cultures. The outcomes of this activity in the listening course often reveal certain patterns which are useful to aid in gaining a better understanding of intercultural listening. For example, the activity can often be used as an indication of student understanding of values in an intercultural situation both before and after the unit which focuses on Japanese culture and communication. Involving students in these activities can be a means to gain better understanding and appreciation of cultural values as they affect listening between cultures. It appears that an activity based on attribution training has merit as a learning tool. (Fifteen references are attached.) (PRA)

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# INCORPORATING CULTURAL DIVERSITY INTO AN ADVANCED SPEECH COMMUNICATION COURSE IN LISTENING USING AN "ATTRIBUTION TRAINING" ACTIVITY

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The message of cultural diversity is forcing all of us to face the reality that to be effective communicators in our changing world we must adapt to and accommodate cultural differences. (Gudykunst and Kim, 1985:235) stress the point that in order to be effective in managing the changed and changing environment and to work toward more sensible ways of maintaining harmony in our intercultural world, we need to transform our cultured conditioned cognition and behavior into those of an intercultural person.

The fundamental element in this process focuses on the more personal aspects of communication, what happens when persons from different cultures interact face-to-face.

(Steil, Barker, and Watson, 1983:12) observe that among the most influential operating factors during communication are the filtering agents of speakers and listeners. Similar to filters used with a camera lens, filtering agents allow the passage or blockage or coloring of other elements. Consider how professional photographers use filters designed to let in some rays of light while screening out other rays that may ruin or distort the picture. Camera filters are changed to get desired results. Similar to a camera lens, filtering agents affect communication with others. Filtering agents such as past work experiences, educational training, opinions, emotions, attitudes, feelings, and language abilities influence how you send and receive messages. Understanding your personal filtering agents puts you in a position to maximize your speaking and listening success.

How does one address the task of enabling students in a speech

communication course to better understand their own personal filtering agents when communicating with someone from a different culture? First of all, there is the matter to consider of the type of course. One, of course, could utilize a course in intercultural communication in which the content of the entire course pertains to this subject. One could also focus on elements of communication in cultural diversity as part of various other courses in speech communication - speech fundamentals, public speaking, discussion, interpersonal communication, listening, etc. Secondly, one must decide which factor or factors on intercultural communication should be covered - language, nonverbal communication, cultural values, etc. Thirdly, one must decide upon the method or methods of covering the subject matter. Should one provide information about other cultures by assigning reading materials, have the students give speeches or engage in formal discussions, have the instructor lecture, one of a number of means which has been tried, or some combination of methods?

This paper describes an approach which focuses on examining communication and cultural diversity as a two to three day unit in a junior-senior level course in listening. The course is not "performance" centered. Listening exercises are employed periodically throughout the course to engage students in active participation. The primary focus of the course, however, is to discuss themes of listening by examining the literature including experimental studies. An activity involving student participation is a primary element in this unit.

The factor centered upon in this activity is cultural values/norms. As

(Barnlund, 1975) notes it is critical to get into the assumptive world of another culture. Without insight into another culture's values/norms, behavior - including speaking and listening - will be interpreted inevitably from the premises of one's own culture.

The primary method used to cover the subject in the listening course is a modified form of a technique called attribution training. This technique is designed to teach persons from one culture to interpret events as persons from another culture do. Several short episodes are presented each of which depict a situation which could involve a problematic interaction between persons from different cultures. Each episode is followed by several alternative choices. The aim is to teach an individual to choose the alternative typically made by members of the other culture. In terms of the listening course, this could lead to the student more accurately interpreting the speaking and listening behaviors of persons from the other culture (Albert and Triandis, 1985:330).

Almaney and Alwan, 1982:12) underline the value of this approach by stressing that whenever we cross cultural boundaries with the purpose of communicating with members of another society, it is imperative that we go through a process of acquiring new mental images about how people would feel in certain situations, what their behavior signifies, and how to respond to their behavior in the most appropriate manner.

The activity employed in the listening course has been used by the author of this paper for several years. The activity is based on episodes describing situations faced by students in the college

environment. It was constructed by Hachiya and described in (Condon, 1974). In the original project, both American students in the U.S.A. and Japanese students in Japan were requested to select among alternative value related choices for each of the episodes. See Appendix A for both the form and a summary of the responses of the students in percentages. The author of this paper has found that this activity can be used either before and after the appropriate unit in the course or solely after the unit.

In addition to the percentages reported in Appendix A, Hachiya summarizes student responses to each episode. This information can be useful in class discussion after the activity and includes the following:

For Episode 1, female students in both cultures seem to act quite similar as indicated by the percentages. Concerning males, however, 30% of the American students were motivated to prefer the value of individualism. Only 5% of the Japanese males chose this alternative.

For Episode 2, the value concerning status is clearly indicated to be different in the two cultures. In American culture, achievement seems to be evaluated as an important characteristic of a leader, whereas in Japan, status is considered important in being able to lead a group.

For Episode 3, Japanese students prefer writing to speaking. American males seem to slightly prefer the oral report, indicating they tend not to mind acting on their own, even in the presence of a group. Both Japanese and American females prefer writing.


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For Episode 4, over half of the Japanese students reveal the value of acting on predictive empathy. The American students seem to prefer to confirm their feelings before taking an action rather than simply figuring out in their minds what they ought to do. There seems to be a difference in this kind of unspoken communication and understanding in the two cultures.

For Episode 5, the results indicate a definite value difference between the two cultures concerning authority, acting privately and publicly, and individualism. For American students, private matters may come before public obligations, whereas for the Japanese students the opposite seems to be more often true. The American students seem to be individualistic in that they seem not to mind what others may think of them when it concerns taking actions privately. The Japanese students, however, seem to be concerned with the reactions of others.

The outcomes of this activity in the listening course often reveal certain patterns which are useful to aid in gaining a better understanding of intercultural listening. Some examples include the following. Episodes 2 and 4 cause the greatest difficulty for American students. These are the values of the Japanese favoring status over competence and their interpretation of empathy. The former could cause misunderstanding in listening where the American student feels the Japanese student is deliberately choosing not to see or is showing ignorance by not accepting the most competent person to lead the group. In fact, the Japanese student may indeed recognize the person as competent but values status as a more important basis for a decision. In their responses to Episode 4, listening for the two cultures is

conducted through the filters of each cultures concept of "empathy." Each may consider the other as "unfeeling toward the person involved with the accident."

Episode 3 seems to cause the least misunderstanding for American students. This is possibility do to the fact that both cultures have general tendency to be reluctant to speak in front of groups. This is perhaps a case of where individuals (Americans) with little knowledge of another culture (Japan) typically may assume persons from the other culture will respond in a similar manner to their own actions.

From this activity, it has been observed that American students even have problems perceiving how the "typical" American student would respond in some of the episodes. Episode 1 causes the greatest difficulty for them whereas Episode 2 causes the least problem.

Finally, when using the activity as an indication of student understanding of values in intercultural situation both before and after the unit primarily focusing on Japanese culture and communication, certain results can be noted. Approximately 60% of the students do better at the end of the unit, 25% do the same, and 15% actually do worse. In some respects, the latter two figures may not be totally unexpected. Since the unit is at most several days in length, it may be a case where a little knowledge for some is dangerous. Perhaps it is a tendency for some to overgeneralize or not to acknowledge other relevant factors when making responses to the episodes.

Intercultural listening is a challenging arena for the participants who enter. Involving students in activities such as the one described in this paper can be a means to gain better understanding and appreciation of cultural values as they affect listening between cultures. The literature seems to demonstrate that an activity based on attribution training has merit as a learning tool. An indication of its potential effectiveness is noted by (Albert and Triandis, 1985:332) when they observe that this approach is one of the few methods that has been evaluated and has been shown to result in individuals being more effective in interacting with persons from another culture.

This paper has described an example of one activity which has been employed in a junior-senior level course in listening. The record of its use appears to show it can be a successful method to address one of the communication aspects of cultural diversity - the role of cultural values in the process of effective listening in intercultural interactions.

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